
INAUGURAL DISSERTATION
ON
MORAL PHILOSOPHY

BY

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Sociedad Economica de Amigos del Pais de Valencia, etc.
Formerly of King's College, London.*



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HUMBLY SUBMITS

TO THE EXAMINATION OF THE

LEARNED AND DISTINGUISHED FACULTY OF PHILOSOPHY

OF THE UNIVERSITY OF ROSTOCK

FOR THE

ATTAINMENT OF THE DEGREES OF

MASTER OF ARTS AND DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY.

LONDON, 1871.

SYLLABUS.

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PALEY.

PRICE.

CHALMERS.

WARBURTON.

BERKELEY.

KING.

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WATTS.

REID.

BUTLER.

ARISTOTLE.

HOBBES.

MANDEVILLE.

CUMBERLAND.

HOPKINS.

SAMUEL CLARKE.

WOLLASTON.

THOMAS BROWN.

ADAM SMITH.

LOCKE.

INTRODUCTION.

MORAL PHILOSOPHY is the science of human Duty, the knowledge of what constitutes the duty and felicity of mankind, or it may be defined as the art of being virtuous and happy. It may be viewed under the double aspect of an Art or a Science: an *Art*, inasmuch as it embodies into a system rules for becoming virtuous and happy, by the practice of which is gained an habitual power or facility of attaining virtue and happiness; a *Science*, since it deduces those rules from the principles, connections and associations inherent in human nature, and proves that the observance of them is productive of lasting happiness. Moral Philosophy is thus an art and science of the highest usefulness, dignity and importance, having for its *object* the duty of man, or his conduct in the respective moral capacities and associations that he sustains; while its *function* is to direct that conduct, to show whence man's obligations arise and where

they terminate, employing as its means rules for the right conduct of our moral powers. Moral Philosophy has this in common with Natural Philosophy, that it appeals to nature or to actual fact; that it depends implicitly on observation, and builds its reasonings on plain incontroverted experiments, or upon the fullest induction of particulars. In both these sciences it is necessary to observe the phenomena of nature, to collect her appearances in any given instance, to trace these appearances to some general principles or laws of operation, and then to apply the principles or laws so deduced to the explanation of other phenomena. Moral Philosophy, therefore, inquires not how man might possibly have been constituted, but how he really is framed; not into what principles or dispositions his actions may be formulated, but from what principles or dispositions they actually flow; not what man may come to be or do through education, habit, or extraneous influence, but what he is formed to be or do by his original constitution. We discover the use, function, or destination of any work, whether natural or artificial, by scrutinizing

its structure, the parts of which it consists, and their connection or joint action. Thus it is that we understand the function and use of a watch or a plant, an eye or a hand, and similar is the case of a living creature, whether rational or brute. Hence in order to determine the office, duty, or destination of man, or what conduct he is obliged to pursue, it is essential attentively to inspect his constitution, mentally to take every part to pieces, to examine and ponder over their relations one to another, and the tendency common to the whole.

The best lesson in morals is indubitably that inculcated by Christianity, which clearly and fully lays open the associations of human nature, both material and immaterial, future as well as present. The details which it gives of the duties that man owes to God, to society, and to himself, are ample and beautiful, at the same time that the examples by which it illustrates and recommends the practice of these duties are bright and alluring. The sanctions by which Christianity enforces the importance of fulfilling those duties are mighty in their effects, while the

representations, examples, and delineations which it affords of God's administration are equally comprehensive and minutely particular. Christianity further discloses that the triumphs, the fruits of virtue are unfading, and demonstrates that virtue's interests are by it secured free from the ravages of time or the power of chance. Finally, the scenery by which it depicts the future, the resurrection of the dead, the general Judgment, the impartial distribution of rewards and punishments to the good and bad respectively, and the full completion of Divine wisdom and goodness in the final establishment of order, perfection, and happiness is unbounded, solemn, grand and glorious.

DISCUSSIONS ON MORAL PHILOSOPHY.

PART I.

THE MORAL FACULTY.

DISCUSSION I.

THE MORAL FACULTY, OR CONSCIENCE CONSIDERED AS REGARDS ITS NATURE.

THE existence of a Moral Faculty being admitted, the writer affirms that it is complex, that it is original and universal, that it is uniform in its dictates, and that it is supreme.

I. The Moral Faculty is complex.

The position has been maintained by some that the moral feelings and judgments are in reality the exercise of a peculiar sense which is in its action independent of the understanding; others have maintained that the dictates of conscience are the judgments of the understanding. Those who uphold the former position regard the decisions of conscience as infallible; while those who hold the latter opinion view those decisions as liable to be erroneous. In the endeavour to free this point from obscurity, the following remarks are now submitted:—

(α) The exercise of the moral faculty is not simply an intellectual act, but comprises two distinct things, a *judgment* and an *emotion*.

(β) All the judgments of the mind pertain to the understanding, in which is comprehended

every intellectual act, whether it relates to mathematics or to morals. So far, therefore, as conscience is a judgment respecting any moral subject, in that degree is it an exercise of the understanding. We do not possess one faculty by which we discern physical truths, and another different faculty by aid of which we appreciate mathematical truths, &c.; we have simply one understanding which exercises itself upon all these objects, and accordingly, when moral qualities are the objects of contemplation, it is the understanding which thinks and judges of them. From these considerations the conclusion deducible is that conscience, to the extent that it is an intellectual act, belongs to the understanding.

(γ) But inasmuch as more than a mere intellectual act is included in the name conscience; since this act is attended with a feeling called moral, which is easily distinguished from all other emotions; and as mere emotion or feeling cannot be referred to the reasoning faculty,—the conscience, so far as this moral aspect is concerned, is a quality different from the understanding.

(δ) If the moral judgments of the mind proceeded from a faculty distinct from the understanding, and often differing essentially from it, the harmony of the mental operations would be

destroyed, for Reason might point in one direction, and Conscience lead the contrary way ; so that the conclusion we are brought to is that conscience is not a faculty distinct from reason, nor yet is it identical with the latter. Reason or understanding is the *genus*, the judgments effected by conscience are the *species*. Reason has relation to all intelligible subjects ; the conscience is conversant about moral qualities alone.

The exercise of conscience then involves a judgment and an emotion, therefore the moral faculty is a complex one.

II. The Moral Faculty is original and universal.

(a) It is clear that the faculty of conscience must be original in its nature, for otherwise man could never have developed any idea of moral qualities. The opinion that moral feelings are merely the effect of education stultifies itself, and is evidently fallacious and erroneous, since unless every class of ideas proceeded from an appropriate faculty, the ideas under consideration could never have been acquired. With regard to the bodily senses, as they are termed, this fact is self-evident : for example, without the organ of vision, the simple ideas of light and colour could not have been communicated ; without the organ of hearing, no notion of sound could be

conveyed; and the reasoning is the same as to the other senses.

The case is equally true of the knowledge which is attained by what some have called the internal senses; thus, if man were without the æsthetic faculty of taste by which beauty is perceived, he could have no conception of what constitutes the Beautiful. With regard to moral qualities also the parallel holds good: there must surely be an original faculty to give us the simple idea of Morality; for if there were not, the rudimentary notion of virtue could never have entered the mind of man, and the feelings of moral obligation could never have been felt.

Those who advocate the Utilitarian school of thought resolve all ideas of morality into mere principles of benefit or injury; and Dr. Paley states that to him the subject appeared to be involved in impenetrable mystery until he took this view of it. The point, however, is one that cannot be decided by reasoning about it, and argument would therefore be vain; the appeal must be made to every man's individual consciousness, which the present writer thinks must in an immense majority of cases overwhelmingly affirm that the moral faculty is in its nature original.

(β) The moral faculty is moreover universal in its character. Whatever difference of opinion

may exist as to the origin of this faculty, the fact is universally admitted that in all ages and countries, men have judged some actions to be good and worthy of approbation, while they have regarded other actions as bad and deserving of reprobation. In all known languages are found words expressive of the ideas of moral excellence and moral evil; and in all ages throughout the world, the implication is evidently made in the established laws inflicting penalties, that some actions ought to be performed, and others avoided. All men of every age and every country agree in their judgment as to the moral evil in cases of injustice or ingratitude; with regard to such actions, no more difference exists in the judgment of mankind than respecting the colour of grass or the taste of honey. The deduction to be drawn therefore is that every human mind, when its faculties are developed and matured, discerns in certain actions a quality which is termed moral; that is, it intuitively perceives some actions to be right and other actions to be wrong.

Hence it has been shown that the moral faculty is both original and universal.

III. The writer affirms that the Moral Faculty is likewise uniform in its dictates.

This assertion has met with denial, but not-

withstanding the strong terms used in the endeavour to controvert it, the pretence has never been put forth as a matter of fact, that between men of different countries there is a total distinction in the opinions entertained respecting that which is right and that which is wrong. No nation, or tribe, or class of mankind,—unless absolutely degraded to the level of unthinking savagery,—has ever held that it is virtuous and proper to injure men, or that there is no more harm in taking away life than in preserving it. Nothing is anywhere more common than ingratitude, yet no one that does not rank as a public enemy has ever seriously averred that ingratitude is commendable, or that fraud and deceit are praiseworthy.

In every land men's characters are estimated according to the line of conduct which they pursue. Some men are reckoned good and are held in general esteem, while other men are despised, because they are accounted wicked; but in no country has the character of men who have observed a uniform course of good behaviour been deemed disreputable.

It should also be borne in mind that the conduct of a people is not always a fair test of the mind as relating to morals, for it is well known that persons often follow a course of conduct which in their seriously thinking moments they

condemn. Such are the power of temptation and the allurements of a habit of indulgence, that, notwithstanding the decisions of conscience, individuals continue in a slavish custom of evil-doing, and it would be a very unwarrantable inference to determine from their demeanour that they acted in accordance with the dictates of conscience. This argument, which holds true of individuals, is likewise true of tribes and nations collectively, in proof of which statement it is constantly seen that customs which the latter have received from their fathers, even if not meeting with the approbation of their own moral sense, are retained simply through the force of long-established usage.

A more satisfactory explanation, however, of those facts in which men seem to go diametrically contrary to the fundamental principles of Morality, although acting conscientiously, is *that the principle is correct upon which men act, but that through ignorance or unconscious error they apply the principle erroneously*. Thus when as in China parents murder their own female children, they do so upon the supposition that the unfortunate little ones are likely to be more subject to misery than to happiness in their worldly career, and therefore that depriving them of existence is doing them a favour. The general principle is confessedly and undeniably correct upon which such acts of

inhumanity are supposed to be based ; the fallacy lies in the mistaken application of the principle. A similar motive may be assigned to the deeds of cruelty performed by Pagans in their quasi-religious rites and ceremonies ; the obvious conclusion, therefore, resulting from these considerations, is established, that all men are agreed in their moral judgments, or the Moral Faculty is uniform in its dictates.

The observation may here be permitted, that the philosopher Locke, in striving to disprove the existence of innate truths, attempted in reality to render uncertain some of the first axiomatic truths inculcated by the science of morals.

IV. Lastly, the present writer affirms that the Moral Faculty is supreme.

That the dictates of conscience ought to be obeyed is one of the most self-evident convictions of the human mind. Even if it is plain that a certain act, such as telling a lie, would free us from much trouble, anxiety, or suffering, the judgment formed by an impartial mind is that no prospect of gain or loss can ever justify us in denying or striving to controvert the truth. The mental judgment that conscience ought to be obeyed is intuitive, and allows no room for reasoning concerning it.

On the supremacy of conscience the following

quotation from Dr. Chalmers is quite to the point, and is well worthy of citation :—"In every
" human heart there is a faculty, not, it may be,
" having the actual power, but having the just
" and rightful pretension to act as judge and
" master over the whole of human conduct.
" Other propensities may have too much sway,
" but the moral propensity, if I may so term it,
" never can ; for, to have the presiding sway in
" all our concerns is just that which properly
" and legitimately belongs to it. A man under
" anger may be too strongly prompted to deeds
" of retaliation, or under sensuality may be too
" strongly prompted to indulgence, or under
" avarice may be too closely addicted to the
" pursuit of wealth, or even under friendship
" may be too strongly inclined to partiality, but
" he never can, under conscience, be too strongly
" inclined to be as he ought, and to do as he
" ought. We may say of a watch that its main-
" spring is too powerful, but we would never say
" that a regulator was too powerful."

Again Dr. Chalmers says, " And neither do we
" urge the proposition that conscience has in
" every instance the actual direction of human
" affairs, for this was in the face of all experience.
" It is not that every man obeys her dictates, but
" that every man feels that he ought to obey
" them. These dictates are often, in life and

“ practice, disregarded ; so that conscience is not
“ the sovereign *de facto*. Still there is a voice
“ within the hearts of all, which asserts that
“ conscience is the sovereign *de jure*.”

All reasonable beings must acknowledge that the foregoing sentiments are unquestionably just and true. However often we disobey the monitions of the “ still, small voice ” within us, we invariably are cognizant that the feeling of self-condemnation accompanies our disobedience.

DISCUSSION II.

WHETHER CONSCIENCE IS INFALLIBLE.

THIS is one of the most difficult questions in the whole science of Morality.

The question at issue is, Can an action, which is wrong in itself, be considered good, if the agent believes that it is right? In answer to the interrogation, many hold the opinion that the only thing necessary to render an action good is that the agent act agreeably to his own conscience; and while such may be regarded as the opinion of the unthinking and untaught, there is another opinion, nearly related to it, which has been held and advocated by some of the keenest and most cultivated intellects, viz., that men are not personally responsible for their opinions or belief. Those theorists consider that men cannot go astray if they will honestly listen to the voice of conscience and obey her dictates; in short, those holding this view virtually maintain that conscience is infallible.

This theory, however, is thickly beset and encompassed with difficulties: for example, it puts error exactly upon a level with truth; it makes that in one man a sin which is a virtue in

another; it classes together every form of religion as equally deserving of commendation; it would lead to a justification of nearly every horror and atrocity, and so on *ad infinitum*.

Now, the root of this error rests in not remembering that conscience is the judgment of the mind with respect to duty. Moreover, as no man's knowledge is perfect, or as no man's knowledge is infallible, the inference is plain, that so far as error creeps into the understanding in relation to matters of duty, just so far will the conscience be certainly misguided. But upon this subject, as well as upon most others within the range of morals, the unsophisticated, unbiassed judgment of mankind will generally form a right decision.

What, then, is this judgment? or rather what is the decision thus arrived at? It is, that error which *might* have been avoided, and ignorance which is not *invincible*, do not excuse the misconception, since the knowledge necessary to duty is within the reach of all who are disposed to seek it. One false step leads to another, it is true, and a man who has adopted fundamental error is labouring under a kind of necessity to do wrong; but the temptation does not excuse him, because he ought to have exercised more diligence and impartiality in seeking for the truth, and he is justly liable to all the consequences of his neglect.

The question may be asked, however, If we suppose a man to have been educated in a wrong system of religion and morals, is he responsible for his false position? The reply proper to be given to this query is, Most certainly, because, having arrived at the years of maturity, it was manifestly his duty to bring the opinions he had imbibed by education to the ordeal of an honest but searching examination. The more difficult it is to divest ourselves of early prejudices, the more essential is it for us to test them diligently, resolutely, and impartially, and to cast aside those views that will not bear the scrutiny of the clear light of day; such a course is obligatory upon every man, and it is no less obligatory because so few follow it. The prevalence of so much error is very largely owing to the neglect of this duty—a neglect that nothing can justify. It is certainly true that if a man's conscience dictates a particular action, he is morally bound to obey; but if that action is in itself wrong, he nevertheless commits sin when performing it. A person whose perceptions are blunted by having accepted a fundamental error is in a sad predicament, for do what he may he sins: if he disobey his conscience he *knowingly* sins, and if he obey conscience by performing an act which is in itself wrong, still does he commit sin.

The question, then, at once arises, How can a

man be responsible in such circumstances, when the fatal necessity of doing wrong oppresses him? To which the reply is clear: A man is responsible for allowing himself to be brought into such a state; he is responsible for his ignorance of the truth. Although metaphysical reasoning does not elucidate such points as the above, the common-sense verdict of mankind, which nothing can invalidate, is that neither ignorance nor error ever excuse from blame if they could have been avoided; and the same reasoning is true of all evil habits which have been voluntarily or heedlessly contracted. If a person who has done wrong were honestly to consult his conscience, even though he had ignorantly done wrong, yet he would feel guilty, because he ought to have avoided the contingency of being in ignorance.

Fairly to estimate the deeds of a moral agent, they should not be separately scrutinized, but should be viewed together in the entire course or series which they form; for one's moral acts are complicated in their bearings and are intimately connected, they form a web in which each thread respectively is combined with, and serves to strengthen another.

The lesson therefore to be learnt from the reasonings brought to bear upon this Discussion, is that in following the dictates of conscience we only conform to one of the circumstances essential

to a good action. Two things are absolutely essential and indispensable to an action before it can properly be determined to be right: (1) that the mental state of the agent be such as it ought to be, and (2) that the action be itself in conformity with the moral law under which all mankind are placed and to which they owe implicit obedience.

DISCUSSION III.

WHETHER A LAW EXISTS IN THE MIND BY WHICH MAN
JUDGES OF THE MORALITY OF PARTICULAR ACTIONS.

A DECIDED negative is the position which the writer confidently takes in regard to the above inquiry, and he finds that the common mistake relative to this subject seems to be in regard to general principles. An idea has very generally gained credence that in order to enable a judgment to be formed as to the moral quality of any single deed, a general law must exist which the mind can apply to actions, and so ascertain their goodness or evil character; but there is not in fact the slightest reliable evidence of the existence of such a law. The real process of ratiocination that goes on in the mind is very simple, and may be stated in very few words; in all cases it is an induction from particulars to generals; the mind classifies, and from the classification thus effected arises a Law.

If the hypothesis be allowed of a man being created in the full possession of all his faculties, such as usually belong only to the vigour of maturity, he would be unconscious of the existence of any moral feeling until some occasion arose

of a nature to elicit it. Supposing, however, that an act of flagrant injustice were perpetrated before him, the moral feeling would be at once called into exercise, and so long as no other moral act were thought of or observed, no other sensation in the mind would be evoked except the judgment, with the accompanying feeling that such an act was an evil one; but as, in the lapse of time, multitudes of different acts would doubtless be presented to the mind, of which some would be good and some bad, a general Law would arise and become concisely formulated to embrace all similar instances, and such is the process by which the law is actually called into existence.

But it may be argued, How, in the first instance, without this law, can an action be known to be either good or bad? The reply is, that it is as easy to conceive the existence of a faculty by which we at once apprehend the moral character of an action, as it is to imagine a faculty which would empower us to judge of the rectitude of a general law. There is a sense in which the assertion can be made that reason, or the moral faculty itself, embodies or comprises the rule within its own limits; and if this is all that is meant by saying that there exists in the mind a general law of right and wrong, no objection can be raised against the definition. The statement simply affirms that there are many moral acts

of which the mind has a faculty of judging intuitively; for example, as soon as a straight line is seen, it is perceived to be straight, and in like manner a crooked line is discerned to be crooked; but to determine these facts there is no need of a mental law, and just as the respective qualities of the geometrical lines are distinctly marked by the understanding, so the quality of many moral actions is intuitively perceived.

Hence the conclusion arrived at after patient but cogent inquiry on this topic is, that the general law of morals is the result of the observation and generalization among all mankind.

DISCUSSION IV.

WHETHER A MORAL FEELING EXISTS WHICH ACCOMPANIES EVERY MORAL JUDGMENT.

HERE no hesitation is felt by the writer in upholding the affirmative side of the suggested inquiry. In every case in which a moral object is presented to the mind, there is a feeling either of approbation or of disapprobation, according to the moral character of the object, which approbation or disapprobation will not be equally intense in every instance. While some moral actions are sure to elicit only a very slight degree of approbation, or its converse, others will excite strong emotion, in which feeling the approval becomes augmented to admiration, and the disapproval rises to indignation. This spontaneous sensation is not confined to the actions themselves, but extends likewise to the persons performing them. In every instance in which a good action is observed, besides approbation of the action itself there occurs a feeling of esteem for the agent; and conversely, in every case in which a bad deed is remarked, a sentiment of indignation springs forth against the agent, as well as disapprobation of the deed. Notice should

however be taken, that these moral emotions are of various degrees of intensity in different persons, and that they vary even in the same individuals at distinct periods of life.

In addition to the feeling just referred to of approbation or disapprobation of moral actions that are performed by others, the mind exhibits another emotion as regards moral actions committed by ourselves, which is peculiar according to their nature ; and in this case the emotion is much more vivid than when we contemplate the same action performed by another person. When a man performs a good act under the influence of the proper motives, he experiences a sensation of pleasure of a particular and exalted nature, which, for want of a better name, is termed an approving conscience ; and upon the occasion of committing an evil deed, instigated by improper and vindictive motives, one feels an emotion of intolerable misery, which is called remorse.

The above reasonings, therefore, support the conclusion that a moral feeling does actually accompany every moral judgment.

DISCUSSION V.

WHETHER AN ATHEIST IS DIVESTED OF THE FEELING
OF MORAL OBLIGATION.

THOSE who suppose that speculative atheism is an impossibility would regard this inquiry as irrelevant or purposeless ; the evidences, however, of the existence of atheism are as strong as those of most other fundamental errors, and since the doctrine is now generally exploded that certain ideas have been impressed upon the mind at its creation, the actual existence of atheists in the world may be taken as granted. Such being the case, therefore, the question proposed is a proper one for consideration.

Bishop Warburton, in his work entitled the "Divine Legation of Moses," seems to adopt the opinion, that belief in the being of God is indispensably requisite as a preliminary to the exercise of the moral faculty ; but the learned bishop's reasonings on this point are by no means invulnerable, nor even satisfactory. The atheist himself assures us that he distinguishes as clearly as others the difference between right and wrong, and that he is as conscious as are theists that a moral obligation is incumbent upon him to pursue

a virtuous course of life ; this, the atheist considers, is an instinctive or constitutional principle, which is to be submitted to in its dictates just as implicitly as the appetite and other natural propensities are to be rationally obeyed.

If intuitive perceptions of moral relations have a real palpable existence in the human mind, then it is certain that conscience will make itself felt, and will operate in full vigour, whatever may be an individual's opinions upon other subjects. When pondering over an act of glaring injustice, no one is conscious of any mental reference to the existence of a moral governing power, which sheds its influence prior to a person's moral judgment of the quality of an action ; the perception of the moral evil of any ill deed is as immediate and instantaneous as the act of discerning the tints of the sky, or the colour of grass.

But how can a man feel the force of a moral obligation, unless he admits that there is a superior to whom he is bound, to whom he is subject ; how can he feel himself under a law, unless there exists a lawgiver ?

The convincing answer is at once apparent, that the portion of the human constitution under discussion furnishes itself a conclusive argument in favour of the being of a God ; the Great Creator has not left himself without a witness of his majesty in the breast of every one. A law is mani-

festly written in the hearts of all mankind, and from the sense of innate bounden obligation to obey this law there is no escape ; neither can any person divest himself of the conviction that certain actions are morally wrong. A man may indeed evolve metaphysical theories, and endeavour to bring himself to the conclusion that no difference, except that which is the result of education, exists between vice and virtue ; but only let an enormous wrong be committed against himself, and his practical judgment will be sure to give the lie to his theoretical opinion. Just as speculatists who argue that there is no external world will avoid running against a post, or into the fire, quite as carefully as other men, so those who strive to reason themselves into the belief that virtue and vice are merely abstract notions, generated by education, nevertheless cannot avoid perceiving that certain actions are base, unjust, and ungrateful,—actions that are consequently to be disapproved of, whether committed by the persons who perceive these evil attributes or by others.

As a sequence therefore to these arguments and considerations, the inferential deduction is forcibly convincing, that no devices can so vitiate, nor can any course of conduct so eradicate the moral faculty that there shall no longer exist any innate sense of distinguishing between right and wrong.

DISCUSSIONS ON MORAL PHILOSOPHY.

PART II.

MORAL AGENCY.

DISCUSSION I.

THE NATURE OF MORAL AGENCY.

THE actions performed by moral agents are the proper and only objects of moral approbation or moral disapprobation. The necessity therefore arises of instituting an inquiry into the nature of moral agency; but this is a question that can only be decided by experience, for it can never be determined by reasoning upon abstract principles alone. The present writer submits that to elucidate the nature of moral agency, two distinct faculties must be shown to be exercised, (1) the reason, and (2) the will.

(1) It may be easily and simply demonstrated that the faculty of reason must be exercised in the above inquiry. In the first place, the inquirer contemplates a great variety of acts passing under his notice, which, by the aid of the moral faculty that he possesses, he judges or believes to have a moral character; then he examines into the circumstances under which those acts were performed, and he concludes that such attributes or characteristics as occur in all of them are necessary and requisite to constitute moral agency.

Or the examination may possibly be rendered more simple, by supposing the absence from the action contemplated, first of one condition, then of another; and upon afterwards bringing before the mind the action thus varied in its accompanying circumstances, if it appear in its moral quality to be unchanged, the conclusion may be drawn that the condition which has been removed from it is not an essential adjunct to moral agency.

To illustrate by a practical example the above inference, such a case as the following may be supposed:—If we see a man raise his hand and strike another person suddenly, and without any provocation having been given, since we naturally imagine that the act or outrage was freely done by a man in the full enjoyment of his mental faculties, we feel a strong disapprobation of the deed as being immoral and deserving of punishment. But if upon inquiry we learn that the man who committed the assault was utterly destitute of reason, we are by no means likely to evince any longer the same disapprobation towards the act, which under different circumstances we should have regarded as being without palliation. Every mind judges intuitively that a maniac, or person who is in any way *non compos mentis*, is not a moral agent, nor accountable for his actions; the common judgment of mankind

is that such a person is to be considered precisely in the same category as a wild beast that commits ravages prompted merely by its ferocious instincts.

Thus the proof is unassailable that the exercise of reason is essential to constitute what is termed moral agency.

(2) The writer likewise submits that the exercise of the will is indispensable to moral agency, for no involuntary act can possibly be of a moral nature. To illustrate this proposition, the case previously supposed may be slightly varied. Let the fact be that the man committing the assault was not in the full enjoyment of his reason ; that the blow was not voluntary, but the effect of a spasmodic, diseased action of the muscles, or that the man's hand was moved and impelled by another person. Such being the fact, we are at once compelled to decide, that in the assault the man whose hand gave the blow was not a moral agent, for the attack was merely a physical, mechanical operation, which did not proceed from the will, and could not with any fairness be accounted a moral act. Hence the conclusion is inevitable, that the exercise of the will is inseparable from moral agency.

Before closing this discussion, the remark is necessary that there are some writers who distinguish,

or profess to distinguish, the *liberty* of the agent from *voluntariness*; but surely these terms necessarily connote and involve one another. If an act is voluntary it must perforce be free; and conversely, if an act is free, it must be voluntary.

DISCUSSION II.

WHETHER MAN IS A MORAL AGENT.

SOME persons, certainly they are few in number, have professed the opinion that man is a mere machine, governed and modified by physical influences; that the Esquimaux differs in all his peculiarities from the uncivilized Indian in just the same measure and ratio as their respective climates differ. It is unnecessary, however, to occupy space in the refutation of an opinion at once contrary to reason and to universal experience.

There are others, whose number is more extensive, who have held the view that man is the creature of necessity; that the circumstances by which he is surrounded make him what he is, and that under the same auspices he could not possibly have an idiosyncrasy different from that which he possesses. In short, these thinkers regard man as not being a free and accountable agent, because he cannot control the causes that operate upon him, and because his actions, whether good or bad, are merely the effects of the causes before named.

This fatalistic theory is plausible, and super-

ficial observation seems to show that the moral character of most men is formed by the education which they receive, and by the opinions of those who continually surround them. But in reply to these and to all arguments which are advanced in the endeavour to prove that man is not a responsible moral agent, it is sufficient simply to appeal to the consciousness of every rational being ; for no argument is of any avail to weaken the force of innate, intuitive first principles. Whether our ability is such that we either can or cannot answer arguments against liberty of thought and action, we know indubitably that we are naturally free, and a revelation from heaven could not make us more certain of the fact of our freedom.

But notwithstanding that a consciousness of our freedom ought of itself to satisfy us, yet in order to aid in the attainment of a more distinct understanding of the precise meanings respectively of the terms “ liberty ” and “ necessity,” it may be desirable to add a few words for the sake of greater explicitness. To this end, reference must be made, not to metaphysical ratiocination, but to the ordinary judgment and clear conviction of all impartial men, all who have not prejudged the question.

The statement has already in effect been made, that the liberty which is necessary to moral

agency can be no other than the liberty to do to the extent of our power whatever we will; that is to say, it is freedom of action in conformity with our will and desire. In estimating the moral quality of an action, one never attempts to go farther back than to the spontaneous inclination of the mind, nor is it thought necessary to inquire in what way this inclination was attained; and of liberty greater or more desirable than this freedom from restraint, the present writer cannot conceive.

It is also important to have distinct ideas concerning that necessity which is inconsistent with free agency. There is a species of necessity, termed moral or philosophical, which is not incompatible with human liberty; and this is no other than the certain operation of *moral* causes, producing *moral* effects, according to the power which those causes possess. Such a necessity as this must be one of the attributes even of God, because it is impossible for supreme Goodness to act in opposition to truth, wisdom, and justice.

But since, according to the common acceptation of terms, liberty and necessity are qualities diametrically opposite, when the name "necessity" is applied to any exercise of the mind, the prejudice immediately arises that such a mental volition cannot be free, especially if there be some points in which it coincides with that which is

properly called "necessity;" and in this ambiguity, as the present writer thinks, lies the great difficulty in which the subject has hitherto been involved. As a matter of propriety, the word "necessity" should never have been applied to any mental exercises which are spontaneous or voluntary, because all such sensations are free in their very nature. When the term "necessity" is applied improperly, although the word may be qualified by being distinguished as a moral or philosophical necessity, still the implication naturally and insensibly clings, that if an act is in any sense necessary, it cannot be free; and hence it is a great misfortune for a word to be used in any such ambiguous sense.

An event may be absolutely certain without being necessary: thus it was absolutely certain that in creating the world God would act most wisely. Again, if a man possesses good principles, and all temptations to do wrong be removed from his path, it is morally certain that in any given instance he will act rightly; while on the other hand, if a man's principles be corrupt, and all virtuous considerations foreign to the motives by which he is influenced, it is morally certain that if strong temptation be placed in the way of his ruling passion, he will yield to the temptation and commit sin. In these hypothetical cases, however, there occurs no necessity, because there

is no coercion or compulsion ; furthermore, if the mere certainty of an event were inconsistent with freedom, then liberty could not be numbered among the attributes either of God or of his creatures. Indeed, reason as one may, no tangible pretext can be assigned why uncertainty should be considered essential to that liberty which is necessary to the existence of moral actions.

All causes operate according to their nature and force, and the reason why one effect is necessary and another free is, not that the one takes place without an adequate cause, or that the same cause may even produce two different effects (for both these results are contrary to common sense); but that the one effect is produced in despite of the will, or in the absence of exercise of the will, whereas the other or free effect is the result flowing from a voluntary act. If the above distinction between what is certain and what is voluntary were attended to, much of the darkness which has hitherto obscured this subject would be dissipated, inasmuch as the difference lies, not so much in the disproportion of certainty existing between the two cases, as in the variation observable in the nature of the causes that have led to that certainty.

DISCUSSION III.

WHETHER THE INFLUENCE OF MOTIVES ON THE
WILL IS UNIFORM.

AS, in prosecuting the above inquiry, persons are liable to fall into very specious mistakes, vigilant watchfulness must be exercised to avoid the adoption of either of two extremes.

I. The partisan of the first extreme view considers man as a passive recipient of influences wholly from without ; that man is placed under certain circumstances, and surrounded by certain objects, in the selection or classification of neither of which has he been allowed any choice ; that he is susceptible of the impressions which these circumstances and objects are fitted to make upon him, and that consequently he is not, and ought not to be held, accountable for the results that follow from them.

Now this hypothesis the writer believes to be entirely and radically untrue. External objects are in themselves naturally inert, they exert no influence on man, and from them no power emanates. To speak with philosophical accuracy, external objects are merely passive objects on

which fasten the affections and desires, and the power they possess of impelling to action depends entirely upon the strength of the interior affections of the soul ; for the whole force which governs man resides certainly within and proceeds from himself. The only sway and rule which external objects can possibly have over man are those which are derived from the active principles of his nature. Hence the present writer feels justified in affirming that every man possesses within himself a self-determining power, by which he regulates and governs his own actions according to his own inclinations.

II. The advocates of the second extreme opinion hold that the will contains within itself a self-determining power, which is independent of all motives, and uninfluenced by any personal inclination ; they likewise further maintain that such a self-determining power, arising from the faculty of volition, is essential to perfect freedom. But the fact has not yet been made evident, nor has even a fair probability been shown, that such a power exists, or that it is at all necessary to moral freedom, still less that the possession of such a power would be either valuable or desirable. All that is wanted is that a man should be made master of his own actions—a consummation which is completely effected by

giving him the power to will and to act in accordance with his own inclinations.

A man is not to be considered the less accountable or responsible for his actions because these are in accordance with his desires; since every rational being acts with a view to some particular end, and his regard or affection for that end is the motive which governs his will and influences his conduct. No one can justly deny that in most cases the determinations of the will are influenced by strong desires, or that when such desires exist, and there happen to be no yearnings which lead in a contrary way, the decisions of the will are in fact determined by the previous state of the mind. Now if in such cases the prevalence of these desires is not found to interfere with free agency, no reason can arise to support the view that belief as to the will being invariably determined or swayed by the strongest existing desire, will lead to any conclusion unfavourable to liberty. If the self-determining power in question is exerted only in trivial instances, where motives to action are weak, or where there is an equipoise of motives, it cannot be a force of any great consequence, since most of our moral acts are performed without its aid. In a word, such a power is irrational and dangerous, and has no tendency to increase that freedom which is requisite for the untrammelled action of a moral agent.

One of the most plausible objections made against the uniform influence of motives upon the will is, the intimate conviction every man feels, after he has performed an action which he regrets, that he could have behaved differently; whereas, upon the hypothesis adopted by the writer of these pages, the man could not possibly have acted otherwise than he did, if he was prompted by the same motives. The averment is also made, that no man ever could or would repent of his most criminal conduct, were he persuaded that he could not have willed and acted differently from the way that he did,—an allegation which brings out the true issue in the present inquiry.

The real question in dispute as regards the will is whether, all conditions external and internal in any voluntary agent being the same, the volitions will be the same; that is, whether a man in the same state of mind, and under the influence in kind and degree of the same motives and desires, will not always direct his will and act in the same identical way. This is the position maintained by the present writer, and denied by those who advocate the self-determining power of the will. The writer is quite prepared to admit the proposition that when a man has done wrong, and is subsequently convinced of his error, he becomes deeply conscious that he could

and should have acted differently; if, however, this conviction be analysed, what is the result of the analysis? The fact is discovered, not that the man might have willed and directed his actions otherwise while he was moved by the same sentiments that actuated him at the moment of doing wrong; but that he might and should have exhibited a different state of feeling or a more considerate attention towards those things which were forgotten, which, however, if recollected, would have prevented him from doing the act which he now regrets. The lessons deducible from the foregoing arguments are so clearly cogent and convincing that illustration by a practical example is quite needless.

Another objection that has been urged repeatedly, and which by some is considered perfectly unanswerable, is, that according to the hypothesis stated in the preceding paragraph, when two things exactly equal in every respect, and of which the equality is mentally recognized, are presented to the choice of a rational being, it would be impossible to choose either, or exert any discrimination between them. The objector would say, every man feels that if two loaves of bread exactly alike be presented to his notice, he certainly has the power of intelligently choosing between them, and that as confessedly no motive exists for preferring one loaf to another,

it is therefore possible for the will to determine without being actuated by a motive.

The difficulty supposed to exist in the above case is purely imaginary, for there can be no perplexity in the matter of choice when the objects of selection are known to be equal. Only when it is apprehended that there *may* be a difference between objects offered for discrimination, does hesitation arise; and when we are certain that the things presented to our choice are perfectly alike, we cannot possibly experience any difficulty. Man is naturally, intuitively conscious of liberty, and nothing can add greater force to the certainty which he possesses that he is a free agent. Although we may not be able to understand or explain with precision wherein freedom consists, yet this ignorance of its essential nature should not disturb our minds, since the same difficulty occurs in regard to many other truths without our assurance of their exactitude undergoing any diminution. All men are conscious that they have a life, though what life is they cannot tell; but notwithstanding this ignorance, they do not in the least doubt that they live. So likewise in precisely the same manner that we know we live, we have the rigorously absolute and undoubting knowledge that we are free, and that entire freedom is equally the natural inheritance of all mankind.

DISCUSSION IV.

WHETHER INDIFFERENCE IS ESSENTIAL TO FREE
AGENCY.

IN every act of choice or will is involved an implication that the person who chooses or wills might, if so inclined, have acted differently, and could have taken a course varying from that which he has in fact adopted; for, if such were not the case, he would be under the necessity of acting in one particular way only,—an action in the volition of which plainly no freedom could exist. Thus, for instance, there is no freedom in the pulsations of the heart, because they are involuntary, and continue to go on whether we will or not. In all actions where the will is exercised, the liberty must reside of doing at least two things, namely, the deed actually performed and some other action not identical with it. By the ancients this liberty was subdivided under two heads, the liberty of *contradiction* and the liberty of *contrariety*, of which the first affords the choice of doing or of not doing some proposed act; while the second concedes the liberty of

doing one thing or another, or of doing either one thing or several others. With regard to such objects of choice, indifference was stated to exist mentally, by which phrase it was not meant that the mind was indifferent at the moment of exercising the choice, for this would be a contradiction in terms, inasmuch as indifference towards an object is a state of mind quite opposed to and irreconcilable with the choice of an object. What was really intended by the above-mentioned attribution of indifference was, that considered abstractedly from the feelings of the agent, the contrary or different actions were themselves indifferent; that the agent possessed the power, *if he were so disposed*, to do or not to do either one action or the other; but the definition was never understood to imply that with the inclination pointing in one direction, a choice might possibly be made in the opposite direction. In short, it is manifest that a man may do what he pleases, but the supposition is absurd that he can actually will to do an act the performance of which does not please him.

The doctrine of a power of contrary choice, as thus explained, is a doctrine that is both reasonable and in accordance with all experience, if along with the volition be included the motive, if with the choice be comprised the desire. On the other hand, however, to suppose a volition

contrary to the prevailing inclination is inconsistent with all recorded experience ; and, as has already been shown, such a liberty or power would disqualify a man from being an accountable moral agent.

Archbishop King, an able metaphysical writer of the eighteenth century, feeling convinced that the commonly received doctrine could not maintain its ground, which affirmed the self-determining power of the will, invented a new hypothesis, viz. that men do not choose an object because they desire it, but desire it because they choose it. According to this view, which the archbishop sets forth in his work on the "Origin of Evil," a state of absolute indifference must of necessity precede an act of choice, for all love lavished upon an object, and all desire of possessing it, are equally produced by the act of the mind in choosing the object. It seems strange that this idea, although ingeniously defended by its learned author, should have found any abettors of respectable and important rank among writers on metaphysics, for, as will easily have been noticed, the above theory is an absolute and complete inversion of the natural order and sequence followed by the exercises of the mind. Yet Dr. Watts, in his essay on the "Freedom of the Will in God and His Creatures," adopted the view proposed by the archbishop, and supported

it with many able but fallacious arguments ; a course which led President Edwards to take especial pains for the purpose of refuting this groundless theory in his celebrated and masterly treatise on the "Will."

DISCUSSION V.

WHETHER MEN ARE ACCOUNTABLE FOR THEIR MOTIVES.

BEARING upon this inquiry exist two maxims which, although they are apparently repugnant one to the other, yet can without difficulty be reconciled. Of these, the first affirms that every action takes its character from the motive whence it proceeds ; while the second avers that every moral act is by its nature voluntary, and that consequently those desires and feelings which precede volition cannot be of a moral nature. The apparent want of coherence and compatibility in these two definitions is to be ascribed to the results of ambiguity of language, by which, however, the true solution of the difficulty is suggested. When the assertion conveyed by the second maxim is made, that all moral actions are voluntary, the meaning of the statement is either that by “actions” only external actions are intended to be signified, or that under the term “voluntary” those affections of the mind which precede volition are to be included. No bodily action can take place unless it is preceded by an action of the will, so that the maxim is quite true

in reference to external acts ; but it is also true in relation to mental acts, if a certain degree of extension be given to the word "voluntary," that is, if the latter term be used as synonymous with "spontaneous." Men's desires are as free and spontaneous as their volitions are, and when the statement is made that every moral act is voluntary, the latter word is used in this comprehensive sense. No need therefore exists to prove that the affections of mankind must have received their complexion from a preceding volition.

The judgment exercised by the moral faculty in regard to the moral character of the desires and affections is as clear and undoubted as that exercised by the volitions. Indeed the volitions receive their moral character from the quality of the motives which produce them ; so that the same identical volition may be either good or bad, according to the moral character impressed on the motives by which it is produced. One does not, therefore, trace actions to their true moral source when one ascertains the volition from which they proceed ; one must go a step higher and ascertain the motives which gave rise to them. The fact is universally true, that the real and ultimate source of the morality of an action is to be found, not in the will, but in the desires and affections ; for instance, when a judicial investigation is being made into the

character of an act of which a person is criminally accused, the main point which the court and jury wish to ascertain is by what motives the accused was actuated.

The present writer, therefore, considers it clear from the above conclusions, that men are more accountable for their motives than for anything else; and that morality consists primarily in the motives, that is, in the affections which have been naturally implanted in mankind.

DISCUSSION VI.

WHETHER MORALITY APPERTAINS TO FIRST PRINCIPLES.

IT seems to be generally agreed that in the soul of man certain principles exist from which actions proceed, as streams proceed from a fountain ; and that the character of the actions corresponds with that of the principles respectively from which the actions flow. Those, however, who maintain that the will possesses a self-determining power, which is independent of motives, deny the existence of any such principles lying at the source of the movements of the mind, especially in moral exercises. They hold that the evil attributed to an act arises entirely from the exercise of free will, and that there is no propriety in referring it to anything previously existing in the mind. The same theorists allege that nothing can be of a moral nature but that which is voluntary, and therefore that virtue and vice can be predicated of nothing but actions. Further they argue that to make virtue and vice consist in the occult faculties of the soul, is to conceive of the essence of the soul as being corrupt.

To consider the bearing of this controversy on

certain warmly-debated points of theology would be here entirely out of place, but the writer of these pages would confidently appeal to the ordinary judgment of mankind against the foregoing erroneous theories. A great array of evidence might be adduced in support of the true account of the facts, if space permitted ; a few cogent and pointed questions, however, may here suffice to bring conviction. The answer to such interrogations as the following must be obvious :—Do we not judge something to be sinful besides sinful acts ? Is not the man who omits palpable and important duties equally guilty with the man who offends by positive overt act ? Is not the man who neglects to rescue a human being from death, at a time when it is easily within his power to do so, guilty of a great crime, although he really performs no act at all ?

As a matter of fact, in judging of the morality of voluntary acts, the principle from which they proceed is always included in the consideration of the observer. As stated by Bishop Butler, in his essay on “The Nature of Virtue,”—“It ought “to be observed that the object of this faculty” (that is, the moral faculty) “is action, comprehending under that name active or practical “principles.” Thus the inquiry which is the subject of this Discussion must rationally be answered in the affirmative.

DISCUSSIONS ON MORAL PHILOSOPHY.

PART III.

MORAL HABITS.

DISCUSSION I.

DEFINITION OF MORAL HABITS.

HABITS of any description are naturally adventitious, and are acquired only by repeated acts. The human constitution possesses a very great susceptibility of forming habits of every kind; indeed no one can possibly prevent the formation of habits of either one kind or another. Still, there is much in the power of every man with regard to the species of habits which he forms, and he is strictly accountable for the exercise which he makes of this power. A man's lasting happiness depends very much on the selection of his habits; it may even be safely said that a man's moral character derives its aspect and complexion, in a great degree, from the sum total of his habits.

The task is not here a necessary one to delve deeply into the philosophy of the formation of habits; the present writer's object is to consider habits and habitual actions rather from the point of view in which they partake of a moral character, or, to speak more concisely, as they are the objects respectively of moral approbation or disapprobation. If one were to remove from the list of moral actions all those which have been

prompted fortuitously by habit, the larger number would be cut off of those which men have universally agreed to consider as being essentially of a moral nature. That there are both virtuous habits and vicious habits will scarcely be denied by any thinking person; and two considerations will show that men are properly accountable for those of their actions which proceed from habit, namely,

(1.) The formation of habits is voluntary. No elucidation is needed to confirm this statement, for the acts by the repetition of which habits are formed are free acts, consequently their agent is responsible for all their consequences.

(2.) Habits may be counteracted and changed by the force of virtuous resolutions aided by perseverance. Where a habit has become inveterate, to oppose or eradicate it may be difficult; but the strength of moral principle has often been found sufficient to counteract habits the most deep-rooted and confirmed. When the assertion is put forth that men long enslaved by evil habits cannot make a change, it rests on no better ground than that no principle of sufficient power exists in the mind of the agent; but, nevertheless, for that deficiency the agent himself is most decidedly, according to all laws of morality, alone accountable and responsible.

The importance of the acquirement of good habits is universally admitted by all moralists. Among other deep thinkers on these topics, Aristotle states that the essence of virtue consists in "practical habits, voluntary in their origin" and agreeable to right reason. Of more modern metaphysical writers, Dr. Thomas Reid, in his essay on "The Active Powers," defines virtue to be "the fixed purpose to act according to a sense of duty." Dugald Stewart modified this definition by the observation: "It is the fixed purpose to do what is right, which evidently constitutes what we call a virtuous disposition. But it appears to me," he proceeds to observe, "that virtue, considered as an attribute of character, is more properly defined by the habit which the fixed purpose gradually forms than by the fixed purpose itself." The celebrated Dr. Paley lays it down as an aphorism that "mankind act more from habit than reflection." He further says, "We are, for the most part, determined at once, and by an impulse which has the effect and energy of a pre-established habit." The same well-known writer, in answer to the objection, "If we are in so great a degree passive under our habits, where is the exercise of virtue or the guilt of vice?" gives the following reply, that the qualities mentioned exist "in the forming and contracting of these habits."

DISCUSSION II.

THE NATURE OF VIRTUE.

THE theories respecting the nature of virtue have been numerous ; as might consequently have been expected they widely vary in their definitions, and some are even diametrically contrary one to another. Before stating his own conscientious view on this point, founded upon attentive and serious meditation, the present writer proposes to mention some of the principal doctrines on the subject, which have been maintained by various eminent thinkers of high reputation.

Aristotle. I. The theory of Aristotle was that virtue is a mean between two extremes. He defined virtue to consist in the moderate and just exercise of all the affections and passions ; while he stated vice to consist in either defect or excess.

This theory, however, is neither complete nor sufficiently comprehensive ; moreover, it includes within its scope many things that are not of a moral nature.

II. Mr. Hobbes and his followers deny that Hobbes. there is any natural distinction between virtue and vice, maintaining that by nature all things or actions are indifferent, and that the ideas of mankind on the subject of morality are altogether the effect of education and association. Mr. Hobbes did indeed assert that men are bound to obey the injunctions of the civil government under which they happen to live, and to conform to the religion established by law, however contrary it may be to their own private judgment. According to this theory, all moral duty was to be resolved into the law of the land. Inasmuch as no natural moral rule by this theory was allowed to exist, the view was held, that except so far as a man was restrained by civil authority, he had a right to do whatever he pleased; and that while he confined himself within these bounds, he need feel no concern about the consequences of his conduct.

III. A system was set forth by Mandeville Mandeville. which perhaps one would not be far wrong in characterizing as the most extraordinary system of virtue ever promulgated. Mandeville maintained that all pretensions to virtue were mere hypocrisy, which men assumed on account of their love of praise. He seems utterly to have forgotten that hypocrisy assumes

as true that the exemplar which is counterfeited is itself among men an object of esteem and approbation; or as the French Count de la Rochefoucauld pithily expressed it, "Hypocrisy is the "homage which vice pays to virtue." That virtue consists in the mere pursuit of pleasure, or of our own private interest, is a system as old as the time of Epicurus, and it has found many abettors and supporters even up to our own days.

Paley. IV. Another theory is that of Dr. Paley, who adopted the basis that all virtue consists in a regard to our own happiness, taking into the scope of our view the whole of our existence; to quote his own words, "Virtue is the doing "good to mankind in obedience to the will of "God, for the sake of everlasting happiness." Following the terms of this definition, the good of mankind is the object of human virtue, the will of God is its rule, and everlasting happiness its motive. If the question be asked, Why should we seek the good of mankind? the answer afforded by Dr. Paley's view is, From a regard to our everlasting happiness; and the same response must be given to the possible question, Why should we make the will of God the rule of our conduct? All virtue is thus resolved into a regard for our own happiness, and, since every

man desires to promote his own happiness, the only difference between an eminently good man and one of the opposite character is that the one pursues a wiser course than the other; but, according to Dr. Paley's theory, they are both actuated by the same motives.

This theory leaves out of sight all intrinsic difference between moral good and evil, and it admits the principle that man's individual felicity is the only conceivable good, and that anything whatever is virtuous, the tendency of which is to promote man's greatest happiness.

V. Bishop Cumberland's theory is fundamentally opposite to that of Paley, and is developed in the bishop's work "*De Legibus*"; it consists in disinterested benevolence, and views all virtue as being comprised in a regard for the public good.

Bishop
Cumberland.

The commentary on this theory may here be permitted, that there is unquestionably much that deserves the name of virtue in good will towards others, and in contributing to their welfare; but to confine all virtuous actions to the exercise of benevolence is not correct. One can conceive the existence of benevolence in a being who has no moral constitution; indeed something of the sort is observable even in brute animals. Cumberland's theory overshoots the

mark equally with Paley's; yet it is perhaps less dangerous in its application, because it does comprehend a large circle of actions which are truly virtuous in their character.

President
Edwards.

VI. A doctrine was published by President Edwards, who enters deeply into speculation on the principles of moral conduct, and his definition of virtue is a startling one—"The love of being, as such." When, however, this strange definition comes to be explained, both by himself and by his followers, its effect amounts to the same as that of Bishop Cumberland's theory, and it specifies all virtue as consisting in disinterested benevolence. Dr. Samuel Hopkins, who was the pupil of President Edwards and well understood his principles, stated in the latter terms his preceptor's definition of virtue.

Dr. Samuel
Clarke.

VII. Dr. Samuel Clarke attempted to formulate a theory which should be free from all exception, and he defined virtue substantially to be the acting according to the fitness of things; that whatever is fit and suitable to be done, all the attendant circumstances being duly estimated, is right.

Now it is true that all virtuous actions are fit to be done, and are actions suitable to the circumstances of the agent; but not every fit action

is a virtuous action ; indeed the fitness of many actions entirely depends upon their moral character. The fitness, therefore, of such actions does not necessarily render them virtuous, but their being virtuous is the very thing which makes them fit, and hence the definition by Dr. Samuel Clarke appears to be inexact.

VIII. Dr. Clarke's system was refined upon in Wollaston. the theory elaborated by Wollaston, who, in his work entitled "The Religion of Nature Delineated," states that all virtue consists in a conformity to truth. From this point of view, then, a virtuous action is one in accordance with the truth of things,—a description which, when it is explained and illustrated more at length, amounts to nearly the same signification as that conveyed by Dr. Clarke's phrase, the "fitness of things."

No doubt, both these expositions include within their scope all actions that are virtuous, because all the latter are fit, and all in accordance with truth ; but these definitions do not lead us to a conception of the moral quality of actions. Of course all virtuous actions must be in accordance with truth and reason, but this is not a definition of the nature of virtue, it is merely a circuitous mode of stating that some actions are virtuous because they possess a fitness to produce a good result. A lack of precision is evinced in the

terms of Wollaston's theory, which is evidenced by the fact that it clearly presupposes the idea of virtue already to exist before proceeding to define its nature ; and on this subject some apt remarks have been made by Dr. Thomas Brown. That writer observes tersely, " Reason, then, as
" distinguishing the conformity or unconformity
" of actions with the fitness of things, or the
" moral truth or falsehood of actions, is not the
" principle from which we derive our moral
" sentiments. These very sentiments, on the
" contrary, are necessary before we can feel that
" moral fitness or moral truth, according to
" which we are said to estimate actions as right
" or wrong. All actions, virtuous and vicious,
" have a tendency or fitness of one sort or other ;
" and every action which the benevolent or male-
" volent perform, with a view to a certain end,
" may alike have a fitness for producing that
" end. There is not an action, then, which may
" not be in conformity with the fitness of things ;
" and if the feelings of exclusive approbation and
" disapprobation that constitute our moral emo-
" tions be not presupposed, in spite of the
" thousand fitnesses which reason may have
" shown us, all actions must be morally in-
" different. They are not thus indifferent be-
" cause the ends to which reason shows certain
" actions to be suitable, are ends which we have

“ previously felt to be worthy of our moral choice ;
“ and we are virtuous in conforming our actions
“ to these ends, not because our actions have a
“ physical relation to the end, as the wheels and
“ pulleys of a machine have to the motion which
“ is to result from them, but because the desire
“ of producing this very end has a relation,
“ which has been previously felt, to our moral
“ emotion. The moral truth, in like manner,
“ which reason is said to show us, consists in
“ the agreement of our actions with a certain
“ frame of mind which nature has previously
“ distinguished to us as virtuous, without which
“ previous distinction, the actions of the most
“ ferocious tyrant, and of the most generous and
“ intrepid patriot, would be equally true, as alike
“ indicative of the real nature of the oppressor
“ of a nation, and of the assertor and guardian
“ of its rights.”

The acknowledgment, then, is formally made with regard to the foregoing theory, that the fitness and the truth, in every case, presuppose virtue as an object of moral sentiment.

IX. The theory of virtue, promulgated by ^{Dr. Adam Smith.} Dr. Adam Smith in his work entitled “ Theory of the Moral Sentiments,” is very plausible as it is stated in his ingenious manner, and has captivated many very well informed minds.

According to the views stated by this able writer, men do not feel the approbation of virtuous actions or the disapprobation of vicious actions immediately at the moment of contemplating them; before either of these emotions can be felt, it is necessary to pass through another process, by means of which we enter into the feelings of the agent, and of those persons to whom the actions have reference in their consequences, either beneficial or injurious. If, on considering all the circumstances in which the agent was placed, we experience a complete sympathy with the feelings by which he was actuated, and with the gratitude or resentment of the person who was the object of the action, we then approve of the action as being right; or we disapprove of the action as being wrong, if our sympathies happen to be of the opposite description. Our sense of the propriety of the action depends upon our sympathy with the agent, and our sense of the merit due to the agent is contingent upon our sympathy with the object of the action. In sympathizing with the gratitude of others, we regard the agent as worthy of esteem and reward; while conversely, in sympathizing with the resentment of others, we usually look upon him as deserving of punishment more or less severe.

Dr. Adam Smith considers that when we pro-

ceed to estimate our own conduct the foregoing process is reversed ; or rather that by a process still more refined, we imagine others sympathizing with us, and in return we sympathize with their sympathy. We try to picture to ourselves how our conduct would appear to an impartial spectator : we approve of it if we are of opinion that he would commend it ; or we disapprove of it if we think that he would censure it. According to Dr. Smith, we are enabled to form a judgment as to our own course of conduct, because we have previously decided respecting the moral conduct of others, that is to say, because we have sympathized with the feelings that have been exhibited by others. Continuing the ratiocination indicated in Dr. Smith's theory, were it not for the supposed presence of some impartial spectator, who might serve as a mirror to represent our motives to ourselves, we should as little have known the beauty or deformity of our own moral character, as we should have become aware of the comeliness or ugliness of our own features without the aid of some mirror to reflect their image to our eyesight.

That a principle so irregular in its application and so capricious as that of sympathy, should be made the origin of all our moral sentiments and distinctions is indeed strange and wonderful. The prominently erroneous point of this hypothesis is one which is common to most other hitherto

expressed delineations of the nature of virtue ; that is, it takes for granted the existence of those moral feelings which are supposed to emanate from sympathy. If we are able to suppose this previously-existing moral feeling, it is easy to understand how we are led to approve of actions when we feel sympathy with the agent ; but the most complete sympathy of feeling is not sufficient to account for the existence of moral approbation or of moral disapprobation. In any instance where there is nothing more than a sympathy of feelings without the existence of the previous moral sentiment, no such mental exercise as that which Dr. Smith supposes can ever arise ; so that the process which he describes as originating the moral sentiments of mankind could at no time or under any circumstance find a basis, unless there had previously existed in the mind a moral feeling.

Since then none of the preceding definitions of the nature of virtue seem to the present writer satisfactory, although they are mostly supported by great names, he ventures to give his own opinion, conscientiously pondered over and not hastily or thoughtlessly expressed.

Virtue is a particular quality inherent in certain of the actions done by a moral agent, which quality is naturally perceived by the moral faculty with which every man is endowed, and the perception of which is accompanied by an emotion

distinct from all other emotions, to which emotion the term moral has been assigned. This quality, being perfectly simple and elementary in its nature, does not admit of logical or more precise definition, any more than the colour of plants and flowers, the taste characteristic of honey, the odour peculiar to a rose, or the melody yielded by the vocal organs or by the vibrations of a musical instrument.

DISCUSSION III.

WHETHER VIRTUE AND VICE RELATE ONLY TO ACTIONS.

REPEATEDLY prominence has been given to the view that moral qualities are found only in actions of moral agents; not, however, in all actions, but only in those which have been performed under certain circumstances. Still, when those actions are considered which are of a moral nature, they are discovered to possess a complex organization, consisting of an external portion and another subdivision which is internal. Any thinking person can at once determine that a mere external act possesses no constitutional or fundamental morality, except in so far as it is connected with the internal exercise which produced it, and of which it is itself the exponent; but here, again, several acts of the mind present themselves, clearly distinguishable one from another, and it becomes a question of importance to decide in which of these acts the moral quality exists.

Now the subject thus suggested for consideration is one respecting which great diversity of opinion occurs, and it will not be necessary here

to review them. The present writer deems it will suffice to observe, that after a careful and most attentive examination of the constitution of the mind, he believes the true statement of the fact to be this, that the human *affections* are properly the subject of moral qualities, both good and evil. The internal affections and desires are properly the springs of the actions of mankind, and the will of each individual is the executive power by which those affections and desires are carried out to the conclusion at which they aim respectively.



